



STATE OF ARIZONA

JANET NAPOLITANO
GOVERNOR

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May 9, 2005

The Honorable Ken Bennett
President
Arizona State Senate
1700 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Re: Senate Bill 1167: English as official language

Dear President Bennett:

Today I vetoed Senate Bill 1167, which would have required that all "official action" taken on behalf of the state be conducted in English.

While I agree with the sponsors of this bill that non-English speaking Arizonans should be encouraged to learn English, this bill does not accomplish that goal. The legislature, to date, has failed to appropriate adequate funding to allow schools to teach English language learners. Consequently, under Senate Bill 1167, English is required as the official language but funds are not available to help non-English speakers to learn to read, write, or speak English. Under these circumstances, making English the only language for official action is contradictory at best.

In addition, the definition of the term "official action" does not include the use or preservation of a Native American language. Under this bill, state representatives are allowed, but not required, to use Native American languages in the course of their work. This limitation may result in inconsistent actions amongst state agencies. For example, the Department of Economic Security may allow its employees to use the Navajo language in unofficial, non-binding communications with clients as a precursor to an official action in English, whereas the Motor Vehicle Division in the same community may prohibit its employees from similar activities. Such conduct would restrict access to state services, to which Navajo speaking Arizonans are entitled.

Despite the numerous specific exceptions to the bill, Senate Bill 1167 remains overly broad, is not properly funded, and should not become law.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Napolitano", written over a horizontal line.

Janet Napolitano
Governor

JN:TN/jm

cc: The Honorable Jim Weiers
The Honorable Thayer Verschoor